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President: The Hon. Julian R. Hunte ..... (Saint Lucia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 38 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/58/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/58/416)

Draft resolutions (A/58/L.23, A/58/L.24, A/58/L.25 and A/58/L.26/Rev.1)

Mr. Shobokshi (Saudi Arabia) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to Ambassador Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the members of that Committee for the important report before us, which has shown the truth of the tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. It has confirmed the Israeli Government's disregard for peace initiatives and its continued rejection of any Palestinian efforts for reaching a political settlement: "Efforts by Palestinian organizations to achieve a truce were not reciprocated by Israel" (A/58/35, para. 17). Every time the Palestinians offered Israel a truce, the Israeli Government would rush to find some way to provoke them into a new series of actions and inevitable and bloody reactions, such as by the assassination of a prominent Palestinian activist.

Israel realizes that with this approach, it is destroying any possible calm and is wasting any chance of progress towards peace. The Government of Israel has adopted a policy of rejection of any Palestinian, regional or international initiative. It relies on a policy of fait accompli and practices State terrorism in all its forms. It creates one crisis after another in a blatant violation of all internationally agreed upon resolutions with its excessive and unjustified use of military force. This use of force stems from Israel's mistaken belief that its military might can silence Arab demands and prevent Arab and international peace efforts from reaching a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestinian problem and from achieving an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories.

If the Israeli Government thinks that it has caused frustration and despair among Palestinians, then it undoubtedly realizes that it has at the same time created its own fear of the Palestinian people, who have lost everything, even their hope for a good and dignified life and for living in freedom, peace and security. History warns us of the end results of frustration, despair and loss of hope. This gives the international community a political responsibility and a moral commitment to make Israel comply with internationally agreed resolutions.

Israel insists on continuing its aggression against the Palestinian people and its prolonged occupation of Arab territories, without any consideration for political or legal questions or any moral or human values. This confirms the Israeli Government's intention and its determination to sabotage any serious attempt to reach

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a just and comprehensive peaceful solution that would guarantee security, uproot hatred from both sides and spare the region more pain and bloodshed.

Israel claims that it is building its racist wall to protect the Israelis inside, including the settlements, from attacks by Palestinians who seek to liberate their land. However, in truth, there are other motivations for the construction of this wall, including the seizure of the western water reservoir that is located under the ground of the villages that have been separated from their land. This also divides the West Bank territory. The Israeli settlements have dissected the Palestinian territories and now the racist wall has created a more difficult situation on the ground in terms of people's lives and in terms of reaching a peaceful settlement. The Government of Israel, by building this racist wall, seeks to impose a new reality that would dismember what remains of the West Bank territories and would make it impossible to establish a viable Palestinian State. Israel thus seeks to transform the project of a Palestinian State into besieged cantons and isolated enclaves, with entry and exit gates under Israeli control.

The vicious cycle of violence in the Palestinian and occupied Arab territories has further escalated, constituting cause for great concern and requiring an immediate and urgent solution for putting an end to this bloody cycle of violence and dangerous escalation.

The international community cannot just stand idly by and wait for a miracle to establish peace and security. It must find a solution to this prolonged conflict and the wars that have destroyed many young men and resources in the region.

Global events have proved the comprehensive and international nature of threats to international peace and security. This requires following a preventive and protective approach to combat these threats, based on the concept that security is a comprehensive and indivisible whole. Commitment to security must be collective and international. Therefore, international priorities require the international community to stand together, pool their efforts and form a single front to firmly confront any dangers that threaten humanity. This commitment will have no credibility if the Palestinian cause is not seriously and justly dealt with and the problem solved in order to restore rights to the Palestinians and to establish peace and security for all the countries in the region.

Saudi Arabia has spared no effort to reach a just and comprehensive solution for the Palestinian cause and has not hesitated in making political initiatives that aim at the establishment of peace, security and stability in the region. Saudi Arabia thus calls on the international community, especially the Quartet countries, to urge Israel to involve itself seriously, responsibly and with no manoeuvring in the implementation of the road map, which paves the way for a lasting and comprehensive solution, based on the establishment of a Palestinian State alongside Israel by 2005. Terminating the cycle of violence has become a collective responsibility that requires us to implement internationally agreed upon resolutions, return to the negotiations table, establish the land-for-peace principle and ensure a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon. This also requires the recognition of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights, including their right to establish their independent State, with Jerusalem as its capital. This request is no longer simply an Arab or Palestinian one; rather, it is an international request that is put forth by moderates and peace-loving forces around the world. This includes forces inside Israel itself, since the policies of the current Israeli Government have proven that security and peace can never be achieved through oppression, occupation and violence.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, as has been the case during dozens of sessions of the General Assembly, we are faced with the intractable question of Palestine. Over five decades that issue has witnessed scores of resolutions by this Organization, together with several attempts to resolve it. Those attempts were to no avail, as they did not produce the solution that the Palestinian people are patiently and determinedly awaiting.

The Palestinian question has been before the United Nations since its early years and has become a litmus test of its efficiency and of the international will and the credibility of the international system. The question of Palestine has preoccupied the world's conscience for all these decades. However, the persistent lack of a solution demonstrates the gap between the noble values of all human beings regardless of race or religion and the actual approach of influential Powers to international relations. It is

clear that those Powers pay Palestinian rights only as much attention as is commensurate with their own immediate interests and internal policies, since we have unfortunately seen that attention decreases and lessens in importance in relation to those selfish interests alone. Every time the General Assembly begins to consider that chronic item on its agenda, we find ourselves before another cumulative, painful and desperate reality. So, what is new this year?

The tragic situation in the occupied Palestinian territories repeats what humanity has gone through under the colonialism that was imposed by brute force on many other peoples. Under the Israeli settler colonialism of today, the Palestinian people are subjected to conditions reminiscent of the abhorrent colonialist era. Both the report of the Secretary-General (A/58/416) and the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/58/35) demonstrate the daily tragedy that the Palestinians have suffered for decades. The fact that it is the Palestinians who are burning in the fires of this settler colonialism each day is testimony to the fact that the logic of power still supersedes the power of logic in international relations.

International relations over the past few years have experienced great changes that reflected deeply on the United Nations, the latest of which was the war against Iraq. Member States have called for commitment to the work of multilateral international organizations based by necessity on collectivity and respect for the opinion of the majority. Emphasis has been put on introducing necessary reforms to United Nations bodies, especially the Security Council, in a manner that would embody that vision. However, we believe that will be possible only if there is a collective will to abandon selectivity and double standards in the imposition and implementation of United Nations resolutions, in particular the resolutions on the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and the establishment of their own State on their national soil.

The movement towards freedom and the elimination of colonialism have not yet reached Palestine, due to Israeli propaganda that makes others believe that its policy of aggression towards its neighbours and its occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Syrian Arab Golan and Lebanese territories are but a necessity imposed by the requirements of self-defence and survival. Now, after various concessions have been made by the Arab side, and in light of the international consensus on the implementation of the road map as a practical option to reach a peaceful solution to the Palestinian question, the Government of Israel had to pretend to accept the solution included in the road map. However, at the same time Israel is prevaricating in an attempt to circumvent a peaceful solution by putting forward reservations that would practically lead to certain failure.

A quick overview of Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories make it amply clear that Israel has been seeking since its inception to further expand its territories through aggression and confiscation of more Palestinian land, hence controlling the destiny of Palestinians in one way or another.

In spite of the recent claims by the Government of Ariel Sharon to accept the eventual establishment of the State of Palestine, Israel, in clear defiance of the latest General Assembly resolution, is feverishly building an expansionist wall that would only lead to the annexation of more Palestinian land and the dismantling of the Palestinian entity. This is in addition to its feverish efforts to expand existing Israeli settlements and build new ones, actions that would make peace impossible, as mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General (A/ES-10/248), and totally undermine long-term peace prospects by making it impossible to establish a viable independent Palestinian State.

In all of this, Israel relies on its historic experience with the United Nations and its confidence that the international community will fail to deter it. At the same time, while the Israeli Government is confiscating more Palestinian land, its Prime Minister expects others to be so naïve as to believe that Israel is willing to make painful concessions by withdrawing from some territories in return for peace. We wonder how anyone in this day and age would accept such twisted logic. What is worse is how we can possibly be asked to accept such twisted logic.

For over a half century the question of Palestine has been linked to the interests of different parties both within and outside the region and that makes it imperative for all the parties concerned to take part in any final settlement of the question. The essence of the question is the occupation of the territories of others by force, which is contrary to the principles and objectives

of this Organization. Therefore, the Republic of Yemen would like to reiterate the necessity for the United Nations to continue shouldering its responsibility by supporting the Palestinian people and by playing a major role in the Quartet's efforts to implement the road map, as proposed to both the Palestinian and Israeli parties.

Furthermore, the Republic of Yemen would also like to reassert the absolutely necessity of expediting the establishment of a monitoring mechanism for the road map that can verify its implementation.

Mr. Jenie (Indonesia): Let me first thank the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Secretary-General for their reports, which update us on the efforts and measures taken over the past year by Israel and Palestine — with the active assistance of the international community — in pursuit of peace.

Israel's rejection of the resolution on this subject was followed by its unfortunate choice to continue its illegal and dangerous activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. My delegation has and will continue to condemn that attitude in the strongest possible terms.

Following presentation of the road map to the parties on 30 April 2003, and the hopes that its structured implementation and meaningful negotiations would lead to peace, there has been a steady deterioration in the situation on the ground. We are concerned that the renewed cycle of violence this year, as the report states, has signalled the breakdown of the ceasefire and a reversal of our hopes for immediate progress. As a matter of fact, the implementation of the road map has hit a major roadblock.

In our view, this opportunity should not be permitted to go the way of previous efforts at resolving the conflict. To the best of our knowledge, none of the parties doubts that as a political plan, the road map is as good as any. Because of its performance-based and goal-driven structure, my delegation has supported the road map since it was given to the parties last year and we continue to believe in it and to support it.

In that connection, a heartening development occurred recently — amid the present uncertainty of the peace process — when the Security Council unanimously endorsed the road map and thereby demonstrated the consistent support of the international community for the process. The resolution keeps alive the hope of a two-State solution and forestalls any attempt to belittle it or express reservations about it.

In our view, both Israel and Palestine have a better chance of achieving sustainable peace through the faithful implementation of the road map than working without it. It is of great significance that there has been wide support for it within the international community, which has helped tremendously to ensure its success so far. It is vital for the future success of the process that the international community be able to monitor implementation of the road map and it is now necessary to establish a credible monitoring mechanism for that purpose.

Whereas the United Nations shoulders the full responsibility for the question of Palestine until it is resolved, we also recognize and reaffirm the importance of its work through such bodies as the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People towards the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

We call on the international community to continue to support the peace process so as to ensure the attainment of the two-State solution — Palestine and Israel, living side by side within secure and internationally recognized borders, as spelled out in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002) — within the established time frame. However, both parties must recognize their responsibilities in order for that to happen, which will include making the tough decisions that are necessary.

One of the most important aspects of the road map is that its provisions rest on a structure of parallel and reciprocal — not sequential — actions. That is one of its strong points, because it enables the process to move forward as each party fulfils a phased objective side by side with the other. It should work especially well if the violence can be kept under control.

Therefore, we caution Israel that the path to a solution to the situation in Palestine is to be found on the road map, and not in its military superiority. Only by working through the plan that has the support of the international community can Israel rightfully claim to be committed to the cause of peace.

Finally, let us be clear about one thing: illegal Israeli actions in the occupied territories can neither help the cause of peace nor can Israel reasonably

expect them to be allowed to stand unchallenged. General Assembly resolutions 57/111 and 57/112, of 3 December 2002, were both born out of the necessity to ensure that the peace process stayed within the limits of established agreements and provided a comprehensive solution that included the occupied Golan and southern Lebanon. There is nothing biased or strange about that, as Israel has claimed, and those elements have not changed either since the resolutions were adopted or since Israel has sought to dismiss them.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): The Arabic philosopher of the ninth century, Al-Kindy, imparted universal and timeless wisdom in these words:

> "We should not shy away from welcoming and acquiring the truth regardless of where it came from, even if it came from distant races and nations that are different from us. Nothing is more important than seeking the truth except the truth itself."

The truth today is brought to us in the form of a question: the "Question of Palestine". Why is a State for the Palestinian people not yet a reality? Why do thousands of Israelis and Palestinians lie underground in early graves and on hospital beds with missing limbs and broken dreams?

Israel approaches that question as a State that supports the aspirations of the Palestinian people to self-determination, a State that is ready to work to realize the vision of a Palestinian State living side by side with Israel in peace and security. It asks that question not as a State that wishes to govern the Palestinians, but as a State that has actively sought to find workable ways for the Palestinian people to govern themselves.

In his speech of 4 June 2003 at the Aqaba Summit, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated the following:

> "Israel, like others, has lent its strong support to President Bush's vision, expressed on 24 June 2002, of two States — Israel and a Palestinian State — living side by side in peace and security. The Government and people of Israel welcome the opportunity to renew direct negotiations according to the steps of the road map as adopted by the Israeli Government to achieve this vision."

Mr. Sharon has since repeated those sentiments, most recently in an interview that appeared in *Newsweek* magazine just last week.

However, today — after the current Palestinian leadership has missed countless opportunities to realize that vision and has failed repeatedly to comply with signed obligations and after recurring waves of Palestinian violence and terrorism — it now seems that the question of Palestine is not a question of Israel's acceptance of Palestinian self-determination or a Palestinian State, but, rather, a question of the Palestinian acceptance of the right of Israel to continue to exist as a State where the Jewish people can continue to realize their own right to self-determination, concurrently and side by side with their Palestinian and Arab neighbours.

While over recent decades Israel has proven its willingness to advance a solution to the conflict that takes the interests of both sides into account, the Palestinian leadership has failed miserably to demonstrate its acceptance of the inherent legitimacy of the State of Israel or the right of its citizens to live in peace and security. The question of Palestine has been perpetuated — year after year after year — by persistent rejection of Israel's most basic security concerns in a way that can only cast grave and irreconcilable doubts on the Palestinians' professed acceptance of Israel's right to exist in safety, security and peaceful coexistence as a sovereign, democratic Jewish State.

Today the General Assembly, in an annual ritual replete with supreme irony, celebrates that Palestinian rejectionism, as is its custom, by taking up the question of Palestine on the anniversary of the adoption of United Nations General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 1947. In observing today's deliberations, one might easily forget that, far from accepting that resolution because it proposed the establishment of an Arab state in part of the original Mandate territory, the Arab world rejected it out of hand, as it contained a concomitant proposal for the establishment of a Jewish State as well. Indeed, the General Assembly's adoption of the Partition Plan 56 years ago precipitated a massive Arab invasion aimed at destroying the Jewish State before it was even established, an invasion that the then United Nations Secretary-General called the first act of aggression since the establishment of the United Nations.

For that reason, I say to you that today we are debating not the question of Palestine, but the question of Israel.

For Israel, the question of Palestine is not a question at all. Throughout its history, Israel has demonstrated its willingness to compromise and make tremendous sacrifices for the sake of peace. When Israeli leaders met Arab leaders, like President Sadat of Egypt and King Hussein of Jordan — leaders who spoke the language of peace to their own people and were willing to take concrete steps to achieve it — Israel reached agreement with them and peace was achieved.

From the Camp David Summit of 1978 to the Camp David Summit of 2000 and beyond, Israel has taken upon itself the responsibility of finding solutions that recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian Arabs and their just needs, while at the same time defending the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Israeli people.

For its part, however, the Palestinian leadership has failed to demonstrate the same willingness to negotiate, compromise or take risks for peace. Nor has it shown that peace and self-determination are the aim of its political agenda. When Arafat rejected Israel's proposal to establish a sovereign Palestinian State in over 95 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza at the Camp David Summit of July 2000 — choosing instead to embark upon on a campaign of terror against innocent men, women and children — it became manifest that his goal was not peace, but remained the elimination of Israel. Had the Palestinian leadership chosen the path of negotiation and compromise at Camp David in the summer of 2000, Israelis and Palestinians would now be living in their own States, existing side by side in peace. Instead, the olive branch extended by Israel at Camp David was met with a hail of Palestinian gunfire and a barrage of suicide bombers.

It may be convenient to forget that fact, but if we want to answer the question of Palestine, if we truly want to understand how to resolve this conflict, we cannot in good faith ignore the stark reality. We cannot pretend that the vision now proclaimed to be the solution was not within easy reach — and was rejected out of hand — not by Israel, but by the Palestinian side, proving once again that its leadership never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity.

Unfortunately, at no time has the Palestinian leadership made good on its plethora of promises and pledges. In the agreements he signed with Israel, Arafat undertook to resolve all issues through negotiation, to stop all violence, arrest terrorists, dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, collect illegal weapons and end incitement to violence. Yet, in the more than a decade since the 1993 Oslo Accords the Palestinian Authority has done almost nothing to fulfil those obligations, choosing, instead, to actively encourage and support terrorism. Over those 10 years, more than 1,100 Israelis have been murdered in acts of terrorism — over 900 of them since September 2000.

Terrorism is not the tool of peacemakers and nation-builders. It is the tool of rejectionists and cowards. It seeks only to destroy and not to create. It is antithetical to the dream of a two-State solution. By creating alliances with brutal terrorist groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad and by bankrolling the Fatah's Tanzim and al-Aqsa Brigades, the Palestinian leadership has sent every Israeli and every citizen of the world a chilling message. It is a message that proclaims that killing Israelis is more important to Palestinians than creating their own democratic State. It is a message that destroys any hope for peace. And that message has been exported globally, spreading the epidemic of terror worldwide, thus making terrorism the single most successful Palestinian export product.

Today Mr. Arafat and his cronies have not only destroyed hopes for peace but, by fomenting rampant terrorism and violence, they have also brought grave socio-economic suffering upon the very people they purport to protect — demonstrating that it is not poverty that breeds terrorism, but terrorism that breeds poverty. The situation they have created further constrains the ability of their citizens to achieve self-determination, democratization and statehood.

Just two weeks ago, a new Palestinian Prime Minister, Ahmed Qurei, declared, "The road map is not the Bible — I will report to Arafat". That is a guaranteed recipe for failure and we hope for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians that it is not pursued.

Israeli society sees peace as the noblest of goals and the highest of aspirations. The desire for peace and tranquillity lies at the very centre of Israel's cultural identity. The greatest dream of every mother and father is an Israel living in harmony and cooperation with its Arab neighbours. If the Palestinian leadership shared

our genuine interest in the creation of a Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with its neighbours, we would see a change in the way those leaders address their nation, in the way Palestinian teachers are told to teach their students, the way Palestinian police treat political dissenters and in the way the Palestinian Authority clergy inspire their followers. Peace requires a language and culture of peace, to replace the incitement and indoctrination that is so pervasive in our region.

But that is not the reality we see today. Those Palestinians accused of cooperating with Israel are lynched in public squares, while those who kill themselves in suicide attacks against Israeli civilians are given unparalleled public praise in massive rallies and official ceremonies. The international community cannot and will not countenance the establishment of yet another repressive, terrorist state in the Middle East. It is wrong for the Palestinian people, it is wrong for the region, and it is wrong for the world.

With the adoption of the road map six months ago, the Government of Israel immediately began to implement measures designed to ease conditions for the Palestinian population, in anticipation of the Palestinian Authority's fulfilment of its primary road map obligation — to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure.

Such concrete Israeli measures included the transfer of Israeli security responsibility to the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and Bethlehem and withdrawal of its forces from those areas; the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in a confidence-building measure carried out above and beyond the terms of the road map, some of whom, by the way, were later involved in the murder of Israeli civilians; the evacuation of many unauthorized outposts throughout the West Bank; the authorization of the daily entry of over 40,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank and Gaza to employment within Israel, in a step to strengthen the economic situation of the Palestinian population; the authorization of the daily employment of an additional 15,000 workers in the special industrial parks located between Israel and the Palestinian Authority areas, giving a further boost to the Palestinian economy; the opening of shipping terminals allowing daily access for about 2,000 trucks carrying merchandise, produce and raw materials into and out of the West Bank and Gaza from Israel, Jordan and Egypt; the authorization of tourist entry into Bethlehem and Jericho, important sources of income for the Palestinian economy; the elimination of roadblocks and checkpoints throughout the West Bank and Gaza in order to improve freedom of movement for the Palestinian population; and the extension of the Palestinian fishing zone out to 12 miles from the Gaza coast in order to strengthen this key economic sector.

The Palestinian leadership, however, did nothing to fulfil its fundamental road map obligation to fight the terrorist organizations, and the terrorists used every Israeli attempt to ease conditions of Palestinian daily life as an opportunity to renew their attacks on Israeli citizens. They took advantage of eased freedom of movement to smuggle fugitives, arms, mortar bombs, artillery rockets and even suicide belts between Palestinian villages and cities, and exploited the workers' passage into Israel to infiltrate Israeli cities and carry out suicide attacks. Today, violence and terrorism persist unabated, the terrorist infrastructure remains intact, incitement is rampant, and terrorists are free to plan violent attacks on Israelis everywhere. In this reality, Israel has no choice but to focus on self-preservation and the protection of its citizens.

The situation as it exists today on the ground demonstrates better than any amount of rhetoric that the answer to the question of Palestine lies, first and foremost, not with Israel, but with the Palestinian leadership itself. It is the Palestinian side that repeatedly rejected a two-State solution based on genuine recognition and genuine compromise, and it is they who have yet to come to terms with it.

Indicative of that crisis in leadership is the speaker who has chosen to appear today on behalf of the Palestinian people. Known for his diehard extremism, Farouk Kaddoumi has even refused to join his own people in the West Bank and Gaza, due to his rejection of the peace process which created the Palestinian Authority there in the first place. With such leadership, it is no wonder that the Observer Mission of Palestine is so out of touch with the reality on the ground, and continues to pursue initiatives in this Organization which run counter to any agreement ever reached — from the Declaration of Principles of 1993, to the road map of today.

The dreams of both Palestinians and Israelis are inextricably tied to the fulfilment, once and for all, of the Palestinian obligation to fight and dismantle terrorism, in accordance with international law, United

Nations resolutions and the road map. The good-faith fulfilment of the basic Palestinian commitment would obviate the need for Israeli counter-terrorist measures and pave the way for peaceful negotiations that are the true guarantee of the welfare, prosperity and security of the peoples of the region.

Israel remains prepared to negotiate with any Palestinian leadership that lives up to its fundamental Palestinian obligations and commitments that are so vital to a viable peace process, through which a peaceful and democratic Palestinian State, existing side by side with Israel, can be established.

Israel stands ready to fulfil its commitments under the road map, ready to make painful compromises, and ready to assist and facilitate a Palestinian leadership committed to peace in fulfilling its own obligations. Now, with the formation of a new Palestinian cabinet, we hope that there will be a readiness to act on the Palestinian side. It is because we believe in peace and security for all peoples in the region that we believe that a Palestinian partner for peace will one day emerge.

The question of Palestine, which we are debating here in the General Assembly, can only be solved by the forum and in the venue that really count — by the Palestinian people in the region. A Palestinian leadership that genuinely cares about the welfare of the Palestinian people cannot continue to support terrorism and reject the rights of others. With a Palestinian leadership devoted to democracy and coexistence, and bestowed with the courage and wisdom to compromise for peace, the question of Palestine will solve itself, and when that happens, Israel will be there to share and advance the national welfare and prosperity of both peoples.

Mr. Musambachime (Zambia): My delegation would like to join other delegations in this debate on the question of Palestine. Accordingly, I wish to express my delegation's appreciation for the report of Secretary-General Kofi Annan contained in document A/58/416, which has provided useful information.

Zambia fully endorses and supports the ongoing initiatives for a peaceful settlement of the Middle East crisis, spearheaded by the United States of America. My delegation hopes that all the provisions being highlighted and agreed upon in the Middle East road map would be fully realized and implemented.

Zambia is therefore hopeful that the international community will provide support for the road map and the important work of the Quartet in pursuance of a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1397 (2002), and other relevant resolutions on this issue.

My delegation is, however, dismayed that during the period under review there has been no serious headway in the political processes that would consolidate the road map. In the security area, for example, the construction of the wall in the occupied West Bank and areas close to East Jerusalem has continued. The wall only serves to undermine international efforts aimed at resolving the conflict and at realizing the vision of a region where the two States, Israel and Palestine, would live side by side in peace and security as outlined in the road map.

Zambia believes that, currently, the road map process offers a viable solution to the Middle East question. It is important that the United Nations support this process by providing adequate resources to the mechanisms that would facilitate its realization. Accordingly, my delegation wishes to stress the vital role and importance of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat. The Division should be allowed to continue its operations in support of the Committee's objectives and programmes.

The special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made outstanding contributions to informing the media and the public at large on relevant issues regarding Palestine. My delegation would like to request the Secretary-General to continue this programme with the necessary flexibility, as necessitated by developments.

In conclusion, Zambia wishes to join the rest of the international community in observing the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which occurred yesterday. We commend the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. As in the past, my delegation will support the draft resolutions to be adopted on this agenda item.

Mr. Andriamarivelo-Razafy (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): Allow me to pay tribute to the Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, Mr. Papa

Louis Fall, whose dynamic energy and dedication have allowed the Committee this year again to successfully carry out its mandate.

Indeed, the question of Palestine remains one of the most serious concerns of our era. In the global context of a complex and uncertain world, our Organization has both the duty and the responsibility to consider all aspects of the Palestinian question until a just and lasting solution is found.

Our Secretary-General has spared no effort in the quest for ways and means to find a rapid and comprehensive settlement to the conflict in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People has continued to support all initiatives designed to resolve the question of Palestine in all its aspects.

Recent developments in the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories continue to be of great concern. Despite condemnation by the international community, military operations contribute to an increase in the loss of human life. Summary executions and obstacles to humanitarian assistance are violating the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people. Finally, daily clashes are affecting the civilian population and creating a state of social and economic paralysis, exacerbated by blockades.

Security needs should not take precedence over the exercise of the inalienable right to self-determination. All peoples of the region have the legitimate right to live within safe and recognized borders. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) has already emphasized this. The mutual recognition that has taken place between the Israeli Government and the Palestine Liberation Organization, representing the Palestinian people, marks significant progress and creates favourable conditions for a definitive settlement of the Palestinian question.

However, the unilateral and punitive measures undertaken by Israel, as well as the suicide attacks of Palestinian extremists, are seriously hampering efforts to bring the two parties closer together. The present deadlock in negotiations threatens to destabilize the entire region and creates an impasse that is a breeding ground for extremism and a hotbed for terrorist activity. In this context, the road map initiated by the Quartet and recently endorsed by the Security Council represents an innovative approach, which is applicable in the short term, and has been accepted by the two parties to the conflict. It provides real opportunities for peace to all of the parties.

Other large-scale initiatives, such as the Geneva Accord between the representatives of Israeli and Palestinian society, should be taken into account. The parties involved are therefore at a crossroads. There is only one alternative: to avoid being drawn into a spiral of violence and to embark on the path of peace. This reinforces the consensus that has emerged within the international community, which has been unanimous in supporting the provisions of the road map. It is now up to the Israelis and the Palestinians to demonstrate a true will to take advantage of this historic opportunity to live in peace and security.

Mr. Gilman (United States of America): Unlike some of the extensive remarks of some of my colleagues and in the interest of brevity, my remarks will not be lengthy. The United States position on the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East has been abundantly clear: the United States fully supports the creation of a viable, democratic Palestinian State, with secure and recognized borders, living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel. Particularly in light of Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) that endorsed the Quartet's performance-based road map as the way forward in the Middle East peace process, the United States believes that General Assembly resolutions that deal with the Middle East question should be consistent with the principles of the road map and the Madrid peace conference of 1991.

The United States views with significant concern the continuation of draft resolutions under the agenda item on the question of Palestine. Two United Nations bodies — the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People — perpetuate the notion that only one party to the Middle East conflict has rights but does not have any of the accompanying responsibilities. Those two bodies, along with the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, cost the United Nations close to $3 million each year. The United States will continue to withhold its share of the budget for those two bodies and will continue to seek the abolition of those two bodies.

On a broader level, perpetuation of those bodies is inconsistent with United Nations support for the Quartet envoys' efforts to achieve a just and durable two-State solution to the conflict on the basis of the performance-based road map, which demands action on the part of all parties.

The two draft resolutions under agenda item 37 on the situation in the Middle East are very similar to the resolutions passed last year and, as such, remain problematic. In our view, the draft resolution on Jerusalem addresses questions that should be and must be decided in permanent status negotiations between the parties themselves. Similarly, the draft resolution on the Syrian Golan attempts to impose a settlement that should be decided through the resumption of Syrian-Israeli negotiations.

My colleagues, I plead with you, let us constructively work for a Middle East resolution by enhancing a peaceful environment, an environment for meaningful negotiations by the parties involved, and thereby helping to establish a Palestinian State.

Mr. Rodríguez Parilla (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The debate on item 38 of the General Assembly agenda dedicated to the "Question of Palestine" coincides with the celebrations held yesterday for the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

Despite the demands of the international community, the crisis in the Palestinian territories continues to worsen while the numbers of dead and wounded continues to grow — the great majority of them innocent civilians, and one third of them children. The incursions of the Israeli armed forces continue into Palestinian territories and the Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories continue to grow.

The economic paralysis brought about by military occupation, checkpoints and roadblocks threaten the survival of a great part of the Palestinian population of which 60 per cent today live below the poverty line. The destruction of homes and assets, religious cultural and historical places, as well as the vital institutions of the infrastructure of the Palestinian National Authority must be energetically condemned. The violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people is the most flagrant, massive and systematic being committed on the planet.

Today we again denounce the confinement imposed upon Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, who can barely move outside of his headquarters and much less travel abroad, since he is threatened with being barred from returning to his homeland.

The arbitrary arrests, tortures and extrajudicial executions are an everyday institutional occurrence. State terrorism practised by Israel knows no limits and must be condemned.

Cuba considers the heroic struggle of the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation and aggression to be legitimate and indefeasible, and expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian resistance and rebellion.

At the same time, Cuba condemns the suicide bombing attacks and other acts targeting Israeli civilians, innocent victims of the spiral of violence brought about by the policies of their own Government. We also oppose the manipulation of these isolated actions to question the exercise of legitimate defence by the Palestinian people and to justify the actions against the Palestinian population, both selective and large-scale.

Added to the long history of aggression, illegal settlements, violation of basic human rights and physical and moral harm to the Palestinian people has been the building in recent months of a separation wall on Palestinian lands. The inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force is a recognized principle of international law. The international community has always refused to recognize illegal Israeli settlements and the annexation by Israel of East Jerusalem and the Golan, as provided for, respectively, in Security Council resolutions 465 (1980), 478 (1980) and 497 (1981). On those occasions, the reaction of the international community, expressed through the United Nations was clear and firm.

Israel presents the construction of the separation wall as a measure of security, but the wall is being built on Palestinian territory and is intended to seal off 16 per cent of the surface area of the West Bank, including farmlands, water resources and villages, which implies a de facto annexation in which the security situation is being manipulated as a brazen pretext for territorial expansion by Israel.

The separation wall, the increase of settlements and the building of security roads between the

settlements and to Israel constitute a clear territorial expansion to the detriment of the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent and sovereign State. The "bantustanization" of the occupied Palestinian territories creates new alterations in the field that additionally complicate possible future negotiations on permanent status and negates the possibility of establishing a contiguous Palestinian State on all its territory.

The Cuban delegation is grateful for the publication of the report of the Secretary-General, prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/13, where it stipulates that Israel is not fulfilling the demands of the General Assembly and that it must "stop and reverse the construction of the wall in the occupied Palestinian territory".

The number of resolutions of this Assembly and the Security Council on the question of Palestine, which Israel challenges and violates, continues to increase. The violations of international law, of international humanitarian law and the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 are severe and appear on a daily basis.

In the quest for a solution to the question of Palestine, the United Nations must play an important role. In this endeavour, the General Assembly has the task of leading that effort, given the proven inability of the Security Council to enforce its own resolutions, which are obviously mandatory.

In the case of the question of Palestine, it is evident that there is a double standard being used in the Security Council. Practically half of the times that the United States has exercised its veto in the Security Council, that is, on 39 occasions, it has done so in connection with the Middle East situation. Of those times, 27 have been directly linked to the situation of the Palestinian territories illegally occupied by Israel, without including the constant threats of veto that have prevented the adoption of a considerable number of draft resolutions that have not even come to a vote or that have been significantly watered down.

In order to advance towards a fair solution of the Palestinian problem, the United States must immediately suspend its financial support for military purposes and military supplies to Israel, which include the tanks, helicopters, missiles and aircraft that are being used against civilians. The United States policy of complicity with the Israeli occupation perfectly explains the statements just made by the delegation of the United States in connection with the functions of the Division for Palestinian Rights and the Committee for the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, which Cuba energetically rejects.

Cuba condemns all acts of aggression, occupation and State terrorism perpetrated by Israel and reiterates its solidarity with the Palestinian people. It also calls upon all delegations to vote in favour of the four draft resolutions presented to this General Assembly in support of the Palestinian cause, including its inalienable right to constitute an independent and sovereign State on its territory with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Mr. Erwa (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I am honoured to present to Mr. Papa Louis Fall, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and to the members of the Committee our sincere thanks for their efforts to preserve the rights of the Palestinians and to expose the spuriousness of Israel's occupation and abhorrent practices, which have perpetuated the suffering of the Palestinian people.

In considering the question of Palestinian, the crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the genuine cause of the problems in the Middle East, we believe that the failure to find a fair and equitable solution to this issue has led to the further deterioration of the security situation in the entire region, despite repeated truces, called by the Palestinian Authority and all Palestinian factions. Israel, on the other hand, pays no heed to these attempts, escalates the situation and scorns all international and regional efforts.

The intransigence of the Israeli Government and its persistence in implementing its colonialist policies clearly reveal its determination to flout all the resolutions of Oslo and Madrid and to dismantle the Palestinian Authority's institutions and threatening to exile the elected Palestinian President, Mr. Yasser Arafat, setting a grave precedent in the history of region.

Israel's recent launching of the construction of the separation wall, to intrude seven miles into Palestinian territory, will sandwich 11 per cent of the total territory of the West Bank between the wall and the Green Line. This will negatively affect the

economies of more than 875,000 Palestinians. The construction should be halted immediately.

The international community challenges these serious Israeli designs merely by adopting ever more resolutions of denunciation and rejection. Such resolutions, however, are flouted by Israel. It is high time for the international community, represented primarily by the Security Council, to assume its responsibilities by pressuring Israel to comply with the resolutions of international legitimacy, thus allowing peace and security to be established in the region. The arrogance with which Sharon's Government treats these resolutions and its impunity to date entice it to perpetrate further massacres and barbaric actions against defenceless innocent civilians.

We reiterate that the only way for Israel to ensure its own safety and security is to end its occupation and immediately and unconditionally to withdraw from occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, and to enable the Palestinian people to establish their own independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Finally, from this rostrum we urge all peace-loving nations to work strenuously to compel Israel to respond to the resolutions of international legitimacy in order to preserve the prestige of this institution. The international community should move immediately to provide international protection for the Palestinian people, to permit the achievement of a peaceful and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem and to establish peace and security in the region.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on agenda item 38.

A number of delegations have requested to exercise the right of reply.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): The General Assembly listened earlier to a statement by the Israeli representative that reflected the same old ideas and even the expressions used by occupiers and colonialists throughout history. The statement was also fraught with a number of basic lies, of which I shall cite three.

The first is that the Arab side rejected General Assembly resolution 181 (II) on the partition of Palestine and that Israel accepted it. The fact is that the Arab side did not accept it, but that Israel's acceptance of it was not genuine. After the war, Israel occupied more than 50 per cent of the territories allocated to the Arabs and annexed them to its State. In the immediate aftermath of the war, Israel confirmed West Jerusalem as its capital, in contravention of the provisions of the partition resolution. The main approach of all Israeli policies since then has been expansion and illegitimate confiscation of Palestinian territories.

The second lie is that the Palestinian side at the Camp David conference rejected an offer to recover 95 per cent of the occupied territories. At Camp David, not a single plan was presented. At Camp David, the Israeli side insisted on maintaining control of a belt surrounding the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for 100 years, depriving Palestine of international borders. Indeed, such a belt would entail a negation of the very essence of a Palestinian State, not to mention Israel's unacceptable positions on Jerusalem and the rights of the refugees. The situation was altered by the initiative of President Clinton, which was accepted by both parties, with some reservations. This led to the only series of serious negotiations, at Taba, that have achieved tangible results.

The third lie is that the current Israeli Government desires peace and accepts the premise of two States. If that is so, why do the colonialist settler activities continue? Why does the settler expansionist occupation of our territories continue? Why did the occupation authorities only yesterday begin the construction of a new settlement in Arab East Jerusalem? Why are they constructing this expansionist wall, which cancels out any possibility for the two-State solution? Why is the Geneva agreement, which was signed yesterday, being rejected? Why are the Israelis who have contributed to it being accused of working against the interests of their State? Their Government is even accusing them of being traitors.

Mr. President, we challenge the representative of Israel to accept now, before you, the establishment of two States, based on the borders of 1967. That would immediately and inevitably lead to peace. We know that he is incapable of doing so, regrettably, because the truth is, for Mr. Sharon, his Government and his ambassador — as evident from the latter's statement — the question of Palestine is not a question at all.

In the Israeli statement and in other statements the claim was made that the United Nations and its resolutions take one party's side at the expense of the other. Once again, this is a line of reasoning that is

truly incredible. We are a deprived people; we have no State, no rights; we are a people living under occupation and subjected to settler colonialism; we are a people that has been subjected to a continued campaign of oppression for over 37 years. Half of our people are refugees. We have been living in this manner for over 55 years. Now, some ask why there is no balance. Balance between what? Between the occupier and those living under occupation? Between the refugee and the person who has occupied his home? How can there be equal treatment of both parties?

When Palestine becomes independent and the Palestinian people can exercise their sovereignty, we will be extremely happy to exchange with our neighbours, including Israel, the benefits of normal relations. We will be happy to come here and receive equal treatment by the United Nations.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): The Palestinian observer has stated that we lied. I state that we told the truth. But sometimes, what is more important than words are deeds and actions on the ground.

Israeli citizens are currently the targets and victims of the most barbaric onslaught of wholesale terrorism in modern history. Since September 2000, when Yasser Arafat decided to revert to terrorism following his rejection of a compromise at the Camp David peace summit a few months earlier, over 900 Israelis have been killed by Palestinian terrorism and about 6,000 have been seriously wounded in roughly 20,000 attacks ranging from machine gun ambushes on the roads to suicide bombings in crowded restaurants.

This terrorism did not spontaneously arise in a vacuum. It is the result of a systematic and orchestrated effort by the present Palestinian leadership to motivate, incite and even blackmail the weakest and most vulnerable elements of Palestinian society to forfeit their own lives in order to murder Israelis. There is a wealth of hard evidence documenting Palestinian Authority incitement of its children to hatred, violence and death for Allah, the shahada. The Palestinian Authority promotes this incitement through its entire social and educational structure of Palestinian children, including sporting events, summer camps, music videos for children on public television and even school textbooks. Jews and Judaism are presented as inherently evil. Israel's existence as a State is de-legitimized and denied and fighting Jews and Judaism is presented as justified and even heroic.

For example, the Palestinian Authority ministries of education and sports have turned the most abhorrent murderers of Jews into role models and heroes for Palestinian youth. Many schools, cultural events, educational programmes and children's competitions are also named for terrorist murderers and suicide bombers. Make no mistake, these are not merely local initiatives but involve the most senior Palestinian decision makers.

As recently as September of this year, Yasser Arafat and 13 Palestinian Authority leaders jointly sponsored a soccer tournament honouring arch-terrorists. The Palestinian Authority leaders included the Negotiations Minister Saeb Erekat, National Security Advisor Jabril Rajoub, Minister of Sport Abdel Fattah Hamayel and the mufti of the Palestinian Authority, Ikrama Said Sabri, and 10 other senior Palestinian Authority officials. Each of the 24 soccer teams was named for a terrorist, including some of the most heinous Palestinian murderers such as Yihye Ayash, the infamous Hamas explosives engineer who first initiated the suicide bombings, and Dalal Mughrabi, a female terrorist who attacked a bus in 1978, killing 36 Israelis. And at the completion of this tournament, none other than Minister Erekat himself distributed the trophies.

Remember, the Palestinian Authority is using international funding to promote this metamorphosis of Palestinian children into suicide killers. For example, summer camps named for suicide bombers are funded by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The hatred, anti-Semitism and encouragement of a martyr's death appear in Palestinian Authority schoolbooks as well. A poem, which is entitled "The Shaheed", the martyr, appears in a new Palestinian Authority textbook and includes the phrase "I see my death and I hasten my steps towards it". There can be no greater incitement to hatred and violence than the recurring portrayal of Palestinian terrorists as role models for children.

While music videos around the world are used to entertain children, in the Palestinian Authority they are used to indoctrinate children to hatred, violence and shahada — martyrdom. The official Palestinian Authority television educational channel regularly broadcasts inflammatory music videos featuring actors depicting Israelis carrying out execution-style murders of old men, women and children or blowing up mothers with their babies. Children are not only taught through

these videos to hate and to be violent, but are openly encouraged to aspire to death through shahada. The clips, designed to offset a child's natural fear of death by portraying child martyrdom as both heroic and tranquil, have appeared in the Palestinian Authority's own television broadcast thousands of times over the past three years. One particularly chilling clip for children ends with the words: "Ask for death, the afterlife will be given you".

Through this abhorrent manipulation of the malleable minds of children, the present Palestinian leadership has transformed the squandered lives of child suicide terrorists into exemplary national heroism, to be emulated by all other Palestinian children. Sadly, this campaign to refashion murderers into role models is succeeding.

In a recent interview on Palestinian television, young Palestinian girls discussed their feelings about suicide terrorism. Typical of the statements was one made by a girl named Yusra, who stated: "Of course shahada, martyrdom, is a good thing, every Palestinian child of, say, age 12 says 'Oh Lord, I would love to become a shaheed'". Frightening, is it not? Permitting young children to be interviewed on television about their desire to die is simply beyond the pale. That is not a culture of peace, it is a culture of death.

Agenda item 37

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/58/278 and A/58/416)

Draft resolutions (A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28)

Mr. Løvald (Norway): After a long period during which there has been a lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, there now seems to be reason for cautious optimism. The Palestinians have a new Government in place. In his inaugural address to the Palestinian Legislative Council, Prime Minister Qurei expressed a clear determination to implement measures to fight terrorism, in accordance with the road map. We are expecting the Palestinians to make an all-out effort to fight terror. A new Palestinian ceasefire — *hudna* — would be a positive first step. It is our hope that the Palestinians will succeed, in cooperation with the Egyptians, in establishing a *hudna* as soon as possible. But the Palestinian Authority must also restrain and arrest individuals and groups that are planning and conducting violent attacks. In the long run the militant groups will have to be disarmed.

One of the lessons learned from the experience of Abu Mazen's cabinet is that the Israeli Government has a crucial role to play in enabling the Palestinians to fight terror. The Palestinian Authority needs room to manoeuvre, both politically and geographically, and that room can only be created with the cooperation of the Israeli Government. It is important that Israel now implement its obligations under the road map. Those include halting military operations, lifting the closures, stopping the assassination of Palestinians and the demolition of Palestinian homes and freezing all settlement activity, including natural growth.

Another issue that continues to worry the Norwegian Government is the separation wall that is being built mainly on Palestinian land. Norway fully recognises Israel's legitimate right to protect its citizens from terror. However, the fact that the wall is currently being built on Palestinian land constitutes, in Norway's view, a de facto annexation of that land. The everyday lives of a large number of Palestinians are being affected. The separation wall might also influence the outcome of final status negotiations, since the wall could pose an obstacle to the establishment of a viable Palestinian State with a contiguous territory. Norway urges Israel to stop and reverse the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank.

Mr. Alimov (Tajikistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We have learned that there has been contact between the parties and that a series of meetings between Israelis and Palestinians on different levels are being planned for the coming weeks. We urge the parties to agree to swiftly resume implementation of the road map. However, strong international involvement is also crucial. The recent unanimous decision in the Security Council to endorse the road map shows that that peace plan, which calls for an end to the occupation and a two-State solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has broad international backing.

Another lesson learned from the implementation of the road map so far is that there should be a clear and unambiguous plan with benchmarks and a timeline for implementation. Furthermore, a performance-based peace plan needs a mechanism for monitoring its

progress. Indeed, the road map calls for the establishment of a monitoring mechanism, and Norway believes that that mechanism is crucial to the road map's success. Norway therefore encourages the Quartet to continue their efforts to establish an efficient monitoring mechanism as soon as possible.

As Chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians, Norway is, in accordance with the road map, convening a donor meeting in Rome on 10 December. Both Israel and the Palestinian Authority will be represented by their Foreign Ministers. The purpose of the meeting is to show international support for the peace effort, mobilize financial resources for the Palestinian Authority and discuss the reform process in the Palestinian Authority, as well as Israeli measures to facilitate international donor efforts. We hope that that meeting will strengthen the peace process and encourage further Israeli and Palestinian efforts to that end.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): Years pass and the international situation changes in various areas of the globe and occupation is virtually eradicated in most regions of the world. Indeed, the United Nations has played a significant role in ending many conflicts throughout the world except in the Middle East. It remains a hotbed of tension and continued conflict because of the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories in Palestine, Syria and Shaba'a farms in southern Lebanon.

We are here once again to debate, under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East", an issue that has been on our agenda for nearly 33 years. The General Assembly is considering the situation since no progress has been made in the Middle East. In fact, the situation has continued to deteriorate and is now even worse than it was in those past difficult years. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territories has reached such serious proportions that it is now virtually out of control.

If we look at the reasons for this crisis, we find that the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, is the major root cause of the present state of affairs and the ongoing deterioration of the situation. It is indeed deplorable that the occupying Power, which is finding various ways of justifying its occupation, is carrying out that occupation by what we believe are unprecedented methods — ones that no occupying Power in the world has ever used in the past. Moreover, it is using barbaric force, deploying huge arsenals against a defenceless people whose only weapons are determination and insistence on fighting occupation.

It is clear that there is no other conflict in the world that has spawned such feelings of hatred and violence and the use of blind excessive force as the Middle East conflict.

In 1948 Israel occupied a considerable part of Palestinian territory, expelled, displaced or killed numerous legitimate Palestinians and built illegitimate settlements. In 1967, Israel occupied more Arab land — Gaza and the West Bank, as well as Jerusalem, which was declared the eternal capital of Israel.

We have seen Security Council resolutions — including resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which emphasize the illegitimacy of occupying the territory of others by force, as well as resolution 478 (1980), which rejected Israel's proclamation of the basic law regarding Jerusalem. But Israel has flouted all those United Nations resolutions and has demonstrated its clear contempt for them.

The rejection by the international community of the illegitimate measures designed to change the demographic and geographic nature of Jerusalem has never been heeded by Israel, which has persisted in its policy of violence and force to create a new Israeli character for that holy city.

Israel continued its greedy seizure of Arab territories. It did not limit itself to the occupation of Palestinian territory, but also occupied the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon, confronting brave Lebanese resistance and obliging the Israeli forces to withdraw, except from the Sheba'a Farms area, which is still under draconian occupation.

In order for Israel to strengthen its position in the occupied Palestinian territories and continue that occupation, it created settlements, taking extremist settlers from all over the world to populate the occupied Arab territories and providing them with various kinds of weapons to terrorize the inhabitants and expel them through bloody policies and massacres, while flouting international conventions and human rights instruments. Israel also built settlements in all occupied Arab territories in a truly unprecedented manner.

Israel has undertaken to transform the Arab features of those occupied territories and to exploit their wealth and natural resources, in contravention of international instruments such as the Fourth Geneva Convention and other relevant United Nations resolutions, such as Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which considers Israel's decision to impose its laws, administration and jurisdiction in the Golan to be null and void.

Following the occupation of the Syrian Golan in 1967, Israel promulgated new laws that run counter to all international covenants and agreements designed to strip Syrian identity from the Golan. It applied a policy of judaization of the inhabitants and built 44 settlements. Among the paradoxes of Israeli behaviour is the continuation of the occupation and the escalation of its practices against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and against the Syrians in the Golan, through violent attacks and the flouting of international conventions. One example is its aggression in October against the Syrian village of Ein Saheb, despite international efforts aimed at finding a peaceful solution in the Middle East.

Security Council and General Assembly resolutions have emphasized the illegitimate nature of the Israeli settlements. For example, Security Council resolution 446 (1979), emphasized the illegitimate nature of the settlements, as did resolution 465 (1980), which also underlined the fact that Israel's resettling of its inhabitants as well as of new immigrants to Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, and in other occupied territories since 1967, including Jerusalem, constituted a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The world is fully convinced now of the importance of finding a peaceful solution to that question and is also convinced of the importance of creating a Palestinian State as the basis for any solution. That was reflected in Security Council resolution 1397 (2002), which reiterated the importance of the principle of two States living side by side within secure and recognized borders. Council resolution 1515 (2003), adopted last month and designed to support the road map, as finalized by the Quartet, and requests the parties to comply with their obligations under the road map.

While the Millennium Declaration reflects the determination of the international community to establish just and lasting peace in all regions of the world, in compliance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and to support peoples still under foreign occupation, the Arab States have made great efforts to find a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine.

The Arab States embraced peace as a strategic option and formulated a peace initiative that was proclaimed at the Summit of the League of Arab States in Beirut in 2002. That was an integrated initiative that outlined clear bases for a peaceful settlement and required the withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan, up to the 1967 line and the Sheba'a Farms in southern Lebanon, and implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 (III) to find a solution to the issue of Palestinian refugees and the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as the capital.

That is the basis for a resolution to the conflict, otherwise there can be no solution. Israel must accept this reality. Regardless of the intensity of military force used by Israel to enforce its occupation it cannot hide this truth. Rather, it should work through a peaceful process to find a just and lasting solution to that conflict that has lasted all too long. Regardless of the time and the number of years that have elapsed, truth and justice remain the only bases for a solution to this conflict.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt to introduce the draft resolutions contained in documents A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28.

Mr. Atta (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The beginning of the General Assembly's work in its current session has coincided with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the two peace frameworks negotiated at Camp David. Despite periods when there was hope for the establishment of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, the region has witnessed armed clashes and confrontation, during other stages and periods that had deep implications and repercussions for the peace efforts that Egypt had worked towards with objectivity and clear commitment, taking every possible opportunity to establish a just and comprehensive peace for the countries and peoples of the Middle East.

Egypt has worked with other peace-loving countries and through the United Nations, which had

the primary responsibility, since the outbreak of this conflict, to make available the basic elements for a Middle East settlement and support it in all its aspects. These elements of a settlement were set by Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 1397 (2002), a host of other resolutions adopted by the Security Council and General Assembly since 1947, the land-for-peace formula of the Madrid peace conference and, finally, Security Council resolution 1515 (2003). This last resolution calls for the international community to support the road map and identifies the need to reach a settlement and revive negotiations on the different tracks.

Despite all these efforts, over the past few years we have seen consecutive Israeli Governments either misreading or misinterpreting these principles that the international community has agreed on. Sometimes the current Israeli Government rejects these principles completely. It continues to insist on its settlement-building policies and on building walls deep inside the occupied Palestinian territories. It tries to impose its own view of the path necessary to achieve a settlement. This settlement must be based on the following points.

First, Israel must withdraw from all Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since June 1967. Secondly, the Palestinian people's hopes of exercising their right to self-determination and establishing their independent State on their national soil, with East Jerusalem as its capital, must be fulfilled. Thirdly, security must be ensured for all the countries and peoples of the Middle East through the adoption of agreed upon measures that preclude an armed invasion or threat of the use of force. Fourthly, the Middle East must be declared a zone free of weapons of mass destruction. Israel must abandon its nuclear capabilities, which threaten the security and stability of the region. It must also join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and adhere to the additional protocols. Fifthly, normalized peace ties and good neighbourliness must be established between the different countries of the region in implementation of the land-for-peace formula.

In order to fulfil these goals, my delegation is honoured to present to the Assembly two draft resolutions, contained in documents A/58/L.27 and A/58/L.28, entitled, respectively, "Jerusalem" and "The Syrian Golan". These two draft resolutions are presented annually in the Assembly, under the agenda item "the situation in the Middle East". They express the views of the sponsors on a settlement of the Jerusalem problem and the situation in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

The draft resolution on Jerusalem recalls previous United Nations resolutions on the status of Jerusalem, which determine that all measures adopted by the occupying Israeli authorities to change the status of that city are null and void. It reaffirms the need for the existence of international interests in Jerusalem and the need to protect the religious, spiritual and cultural aspects of this city. It also reiterates its determination that any measures that Israel adopts to impose its sovereignty over this city are considered illegal and therefore null and void. The draft resolution also deplores some countries' decision to transfer their embassies to Jerusalem and stresses that any comprehensive peace settlement must take into account the legitimate considerations of the Palestinian and Israeli sides in order to guarantee the freedom of worship and belief of the residents of that city.

The second draft resolution, regarding the Syrian Golan, reaffirms the provisions of Security Council resolution 497 (1981) on the occupied Syrian Golan and Israel's continuing non-implementation of the resolution. It states that the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War continues to apply to the occupied Golan and affirms the need for Israel to abide by it. It affirms the illegitimate nature of Israel's settlements in the Golan and its refusal to withdraw from those territories and expresses grave concern over the stalemated peace process with respect to Syria. The draft resolution also affirms that any Israeli sovereignty over or law regarding the Golan is null and void and that Israel's de facto annexation of this territory is considered an obstruction to peace in the region. It demands that Israel withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and calls on all concerned countries and the international community to exert all efforts to guarantee the launching of a peace process according to Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

Mr. Mekdad (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We consider today the two items on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine. These are extremely difficult and complex circumstances, due to Israel's continued occupation of Arab territories and its refusal to comply with international law and to implement Security Council

resolutions designed to reach a comprehensive and just solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

The majority of world leaders have declared from this rostrum their rejection and denunciation of the continued Israeli occupation of Arab territories and Israel's daily oppressive actions. They have demanded that Israel put an end to the bloodshed and the destruction of the Palestinian infrastructure, that it halt the construction of its expansionist apartheid wall and that it also put an end to its policy of assassination, annexation of territories and establishment of settlements.

At the same time, Israel continues its inhumane practices, without distinguishing between women, children or the elderly, using jet fighters and tanks against unarmed civilians, refusing to heed all Security Council resolutions and appeals regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict, which now number a total of 37, and resolutions of the General Assembly, which now number 600. All these resolutions remain hostage to Israel's disregard for international legitimacy.

In reaffirming Israel's disregard and lack of respect for the United Nations, the representative of Israel has attacked the United Nations in a number of statements, including at a press conference a few days ago, when the countries of the world rejected Israel's blackmail policy. Israel's representative accused the General Assembly of hypocrisy and made other shameful accusations, which we cannot mention. The representative of Israel does not realize that the United Nations represents the values and ideals that the international community has vowed to respect and that occupation and oppression cannot be justified or defended.

Israel, while occupying the Syrian Golan, has enacted mandatory legislation that runs counter to its commitments, under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, as an occupying Power. Israel has used all possible means to confiscate land, to Judaize the population, to implant settlements and to bring in settlers from around the world, together with others who have no previous ties to the occupied land. This is done at the expense of the population of the Syrian Arab Golan and it deprives them of every basic humanitarian right. The forces of occupation have expelled the Syrian Arab inhabitants from their homes, villages and farms — 244 in all — and have destroyed them. I would like to mention here that the number of those expelled since the occupation of the Golan by Israel in 1967 has reached half a million. They are all waiting to return to their land and homes.

Israel continues to deface the history of the Golan, plunder its antiquities, destroy its environment and burn its forests. It continues to build new settlements and expand existing ones in the Syrian Golan, in violation of all resolutions of international legitimacy and rejecting all international calls to end its aggressive settler policies. It has recently formed a committee to oversee the construction of 600 new housing units in the 44 settlements it has established so far. Moreover, this committee decided to allocate financial support to settlers to encourage them to settle the land.

Israel has also enacted a law that perpetuates the occupation of the Golan. From the podium of the General Assembly Syria has called on those countries that were misled by Israeli propaganda not to participate unknowingly in excavating the antiquities of the Golan or in importing goods produced by Israeli settlements in the occupied Golan, but instead to abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which considers the Israeli occupation of the Golan and the decision to impose Israeli sovereignty over it null and void and illegal.

The inhabitants of the Syrian Arab Golan have suffered the same fate as the Palestinians for more than 30 years. They reject the Israeli occupation and adhere to their homeland, and are in solidarity with the Arab Palestinian people in their heroic intifada to liberate their land and establish an independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. Our people in the Golan will continue their struggle to liberate their land, no matter how powerful the weapons of destruction and occupation.

The occupied Palestinian territories have lately become real battlefields in which the Israeli occupying forces have committed war crimes and State terrorism, using lethal weapons to kill thousands of innocent, unarmed Palestinians with unprecedented barbarity. As was noted in the Secretary-General's report (A/ES-10/248), Israel continues to construct its expansionist racist wall in violation of General Assembly resolution ES-10/13, adopted at the tenth emergency special session. Israeli fighter jets continue to violate the Blue Line in southern Lebanon, violating the sovereignty of an independent State and terrorizing

its inhabitants. The situation in the region continues to deteriorate owing to Israel's escalation of the conflict. According to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), since May 2000, Israel has violated Lebanon's sovereignty 8,400 times.

Condoning such terrorist Israeli policies is no longer acceptable. The actions of the Israeli occupation authorities destroy all hope and international efforts for the establishment of peace in the Middle East. Those Israeli incursions, which are totally unjustified, such as the one that took place against the village of Ein Saheb in Syria, cannot but increase tension in the region and drag it to the brink of explosion. That attack, in addition to other threats, was a blatant attempt by the Israeli war Government to export its internal crises and to divert attention from its failure to achieve the elusive security that it has promised to the Israelis.

Syria, which has exercised constraint and resorted to international legitimacy, is capable of facing aggression and of defending its land and dignity. The Syrian President, Mr. Bashar Al-Assad, in his statement before the Islamic Summit Conference in Putrajaya, Malaysia, stated:

> "Experience has proven, particularly recent experience, that military force cannot be a substitute for diplomacy. It cannot replace reason. Rather, it requires greater reason. Israelis should realize that fact and realize that, no matter how militarily powerful they are, they will not be able to achieve their objectives and will not be able to frighten us."

Any observer of Israeli practices would realize that Israel's real objective is not self defence, as it claims. Rather, it is defending its policy of expansionism, the confiscation of land and the continuation of settlements. It is an attempt to defend and succeed in its policies of aggression.

The time has come for Israel to be convinced that its attempts to mislead world public opinion have failed. Recent public opinion polls in many countries testify to the fact that the peoples of the world reject the occupation, which is the main and only plague afflicting the Middle East region, whatever Israel may claim.

Syria would like to reiterate once again the option of a just and comprehensive peace based on the framework of the Madrid Conference, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the principle of land for peace, requiring Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, including the completion of its withdrawal from Lebanese territories, and guaranteeing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the establishment of their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital. The Arabs have unanimously expressed their views by adopting the Beirut Summit peace initiative, which has been met by Israel with prevarication and disregard and the commission of further killings and oppression.

Mr. Staehelin (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): The situation in the Middle East continues to be a cause of serious concern. Over the past months, we have witnessed a spiral of violence on the ground that has been reflected in a marked and alarming deterioration of the situation. Today it is urgent that we give fresh impetus to the process of negotiation and give a clear sign of hope to the peoples concerned.

Switzerland approves all efforts to implement the road map and strongly supports it. It regards the road map as a vital contribution to the efforts of the international community to promote a peaceful solution in the Middle East, including the Israeli-Syrian and the Israeli-Lebanese tracks. The road map is still encountering serious difficulties, but it remains the only solution. It offers a means of responding to Israel's need for security and recognition, while making the Palestinians' right to an independent and viable State a reality. Switzerland urges Israelis and Palestinians to strictly honour each and every one of their obligations. It also welcomes the efforts of the Security Council and its adoption of resolution 1515 (2003).

It is incumbent on the Palestinian Authority to restore the security and credibility that it needs if it wishes to continue to be an indispensable partner in the peace process. In that respect, the reform of its institutions and the organization of free elections will constitute the new foundation of its legitimacy.

The Palestinians must do everything within their power to stop the attacks on civilians and to that end they must choose a leadership determined to fight terrorism. The Prime Minister must be invested with the necessary authority to combat terror and violence and to restore public order. No political cause can justify those attacks that, in addition to their illegal and intolerable character, destroy the legitimate aspirations

of the Palestinian people. Switzerland has consistently condemned such attacks because they constitute a grave violation of international law and reduce Israeli support for the peace process.

Israeli actions in violation of international law, including extrajudicial executions, the building of a separation wall, the demolition of houses and the expansion of settlements, only increase the distress of the Palestinians, who are already facing a disastrous economic situation. They also weaken the Palestinian Authority's ability to exercise its responsibilities, and in particular to prevent and, if necessary, to repress, violence. Israel undoubtedly has an inalienable right to fight terrorism. However, the disproportionate use of armed force only worsens the vicious cycle of violence.

As for the construction of the separation wall, this structure gravely jeopardizes the vision of two States living side by side in peace. The wall, which has been constructed beyond the Green line, encroaches considerably on the territories occupied in 1967 and paves the way for confiscations that are contrary to international humanitarian law, notably to the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to the agreements signed between the Israelis and Palestinians. That obstacle to the peace process must be dismantled. It is contrary to the road map.

The building of new settlements in the occupied territories, despite the undertakings contained in the road map, violates international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and it is a major obstacle to peace. Switzerland attaches great importance to respect for international law and, in particular, international humanitarian law. It has consistently reminded the parties to the conflict of their obligations in that regard and it will continue to do so. The importance of the Declaration of 5 December 2001, adopted by the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, should be recalled in that context. It underlines the specific responsibilities and obligations of each of the two parties.

It is encouraging to note that, despite the prevailing pessimism, private initiatives by eminent Israelis and Palestinians — such as the Geneva Accord and the so-called Nusseibeh-Ayalon Initiative — offer new possibilities for breaking the present deadlock and for settling the final status issues, including Jerusalem, the settlements and the refugees. Those private initiatives do not seek to replace official diplomatic negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. They are complementary to the road map. They should be welcomed because they are following paths identical to those outlined in previous peace plans and because they are brave attempts by Israeli and Palestinian civil society to show that a peace dialogue is possible to resolve the current deadlock.

It is imperative that the parties resume negotiations and that all people of good will — whether or not they occupy official positions — get down to this task and bring to it all their determination, intelligence and imagination to achieve the vision of two States, Israel and the future Palestinian State, living side by side in peace.

The international community must remain mobilized, continuing to exert pressure on the parties to exercise maximum restraint and prevent any new escalation of violence. Through respect for the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law, and by honouring the commitments contained in the road map, a constructive and positive message can be sent pointing the way to a shared and peaceful future for all peoples of the region. In that context, Switzerland wishes to reaffirm its firm commitment to the search for a peaceful solution in the Middle East.

Mr. Gillerman (Israel): For much of the past decade, the peoples of the Middle East looked to the future with great optimism. For the first time since the Second World War, nations and individuals allowed themselves to dream that the conflicts that had raged for so long, and claimed so many innocent lives, would henceforth be considered relics of history. They believed that we were entering an exciting new era, where conflict would yield to cooperation and the opportunities of a brave new world would replace history's bickering over land and resources.

Today, much of that optimism and excitement has been obliterated by the ominous smoke that inevitably rises from the region's ever more numerous suicide attacks and terrorist bombs. Fear and worry have replaced the hope that once prevailed. We now stand in danger of raising a new generation resigned to the reality of endless war.

We know from our own history, however, that that does not have to be. While war and terrorism have

characterized much of the Middle East's history in the last century, it is not the only path available to us. There is an alternative path — the path of dialogue and reconciliation, based upon the respect for the rights of all States and an unshakeable commitment to non-violence and mutual recognition.

It was that commitment that enabled Israel to conclude peace treaties with two of its neighbours, Egypt and Jordan. Those landmark events, which were the product of negotiations with truly brave Arab leaders, paved the way for the improvement of our relations with other States in the region, gave impetus to the bilateral peace negotiations between Israel and Syria, generated bilateral and multilateral regional economic cooperation and promoted the signing of Israel-Palestinian interim agreements which were intended to inaugurate an historic course of reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. They also demonstrated conclusively that only a negotiated settlement — not endless United Nations General Assembly resolutions — can bring peace to the region and prosperity to its people.

The hope generated by the Middle East peace process was founded on a simple yet profound notion — mutual recognition. When there is mutual recognition of the legitimacy and rights of all peoples and States in the region, the path of negotiation necessarily replaces the path of violence and imposed solutions. It is only when one side denies that legitimacy, that violence and terrorism become an acceptable means to achieve one's goals.

Israel proved then, and reiterates today, that it respects the legitimate rights of all peoples in the Middle East, including, of course, the rights of the Palestinian people. We are ready to implement the road map, as envisioned by President Bush in his visionary speech of 24 June 2002, and engage in genuine negotiations with our neighbours to reach a just and lasting settlement.

But the message we have received in return — from the barrage of terrorist attacks against innocent civilians; from the virulent incitement and anti-Semitism that plague much of our region; from the funding, support and glorification of murder as martyrdom; and from the endless resort to blatantly one-sided resolutions and selective treatment of Israel at the United Nations — is crystal clear. If one wants to really understand the causes of the Arab-Israeli conflict, one need look no further than the continuing refusal of too many countries in the region to recognize the legitimate rights of the Jewish people to self-determination in their ancient homeland, side by side with their Arab neighbours. It is this rejection that feeds the aggression demonstrated against Israel. And it is this rejection that has compelled Israel to focus on self-preservation and on the protection of its citizens.

For all the suffering caused to Israeli citizens by this policy of rejectionism and terrorism, the suffering and despair it has brought to Arab societies are in many ways just as tragic. For Israel this policy, while it has caused untold hardship, has also taught us how to defend ourselves. It has hardened our resolve and our dedication to protect the welfare of Israel's citizens and our legitimate rights, and it has encouraged a spirit of innovation and creativity in Israeli society that has made Israel a world leader in a wide variety of technological, scientific, agricultural and social fields.

For many States in the Arab world, the deadly combination of support for terrorism and repressive and non-democratic rule not only has failed to deliver any political gains, but promises only hopelessness and despair for Arab societies. The Arab world that has so much to offer humanity and that was, and must be again, a leader in many positive developments in scientific and human realms throughout world history has been set drastically backwards and off course by this terrible alliance between terror and tyranny. Terrorism is the enemy of the untapped potential of the men and women of Arab societies, at least as much as it is the enemy of the innocent victims around the world which it so callously targets. The Arab world in general, and Palestinian society in particular, serve as tragic proof yet again that it is not poverty that breeds terror, but terror that breeds poverty.

We can, if we wish, pretend that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the cause of all that is wrong in the Middle East. We can pretend that illiteracy, the lack of development and the terrible deficit in freedom and democracy from Yemen to Syria are all products of Israel's policy of countering the terrorism that targets its citizens. No doubt we will hear that tired accusation made again and again and again in today's debate, but too often the mantra of "root causes" and of "occupation" is invoked in the United Nations to justify the unjustifiable and morally bankrupt strategy of terrorism, rather than to really understand the problems plaguing our region. It is designed to

obscure, not to illuminate — to serve as a pretext for repressive rule. It fundamentally confuses symptom and cause.

If we want to truly get to the heart of understanding and improving the situation in the Middle East, we must look to the lack of democratic values and institutions. We must look to extremism, fundamentalism and intolerance. We must look to incitement, anti-Semitism and the rejection of the rights of others. We must look to the repression of women, the rampant corruption, the lack of transparency and the culture of lies. It is those factors, more than any other, that feed terrorism and warmongering, that prevent self-reflection and personal responsibility, that endanger and impoverish all the peoples of the region, and that block the achievement of a dignified and lasting peace. Democracies do not make war with one another and they do not sponsor terrorism against their own or each other's citizens.

If we are to honestly consider the situation in the Middle East, we must, sadly, admit that, while large parts of the world have discovered democracy over the past few decades, the Middle East, and especially the Arab world, have remained a dam of tyranny against the waves of democracy and an island of poverty in a sea of prosperity. These factors nourish and sustain much of the terrorism that has targeted innocents from Bali to Istanbul, and from New York to Jerusalem, and will continue to do so. Those factors and the fundamentalist mindset from which they originate have also prevented the creation of a political and cultural environment in which genuine peace and concessions are possible.

But those factors also led to a Middle Eastern catastrophe in the last century that has been too long denied its rightful place on the international agenda and which I would like to briefly draw attention to today: the systematic persecution of Jews in Arab countries.

While the history of the twentieth century reveals a consistent, widespread pattern of State-sanctioned discrimination, anti-Semitism and persecution of Jewish minorities by Arab regimes, upon the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 the status of Jews in Arab countries changed dramatically for the worse. As virtually all Arab countries declared war or backed the war against Israel, Jews were either uprooted from their countries of residence or became subjugated, political hostages of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In virtually all cases, as Jews were forced to flee, individual and communal properties were seized and/or confiscated without any compensation provided by the Arab Governments involved, in clear violation of international human rights norms.

While history clearly reveals that there were major population movements that occurred during those years of turmoil in the Middle East, the fact that there were actually more Jews uprooted from Arab countries than there were Palestinian Arabs who became refugees as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been conveniently forgotten.

The legitimate rights of former Jewish refugees displaced from Arab countries is an issue that has not yet been adequately addressed by the international community. Since 1947, there have been over 681 United Nations resolutions on the Middle East conflict, including 101 that refer directly to the plight of Palestinian refugees. Not one of those resolutions even mentions the plight of Jewish refugees, let alone calls for action to address their suffering.

If we are to address fairly the situation in the Middle East, the plight of those Jewish refugees can no longer be forgotten. No comprehensive Middle East peace settlement can be reached without recognition of and redress for the legitimate rights of Jews displaced from Arab countries.

In our annual statement on this item, we have usually drawn attention to the specific policies of certain regimes in the region that continue to foster acts of terrorism and advocate aggression against Israel and its citizens. We have spoken of the danger posed by terrorist organizations such as Hizbullah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad and of the extensive support, safe harbour and financing they receive from countries such as Iran, Syria and Lebanon. The destructive policies of those countries and the grave threat posed by those regimes and by the terrifying combination of Iran's illegal nuclear weapons programme, its hostile intentions and its repressive regime are well known to all representatives and to the world at large. The fact that these countries continue to sponsor terrorism — even as the world has united to combat it — remains a serious strategic threat to international peace and security.

But today we would like to focus on hope rather than danger. We believe that the peoples of the Middle East are no less entitled to democratic, transparent and

enlightened rule than the rest of the world's citizens. And we choose to believe that, sooner or later, a leadership will develop and emerge in the region that will guarantee prosperity, freedom, dignity and peace for all. We sincerely hope that the potential for positive change that has been initiated in Iraq and, to a lesser extent, in some other countries in the region will usher in a new era of hope and peace in the Middle East.

Israel prays for the prosperity and progress of our neighbours in the region. We hope that all citizens in the Middle East will be able to live in safety, security, dignity and freedom within their own sovereign States. And we remain ready to work together with all States in the region, not just to achieve peace and a normalization of relations, but also to jointly advance all fields of human endeavour for the mutual benefit of all our peoples.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): Before I start my statement today, I would like to make two remarks.

The first one is about the last speaker. Despite the disgust that I felt while he was giving his statement, I will try to stick to my statement and not turn it into a right of reply.

My second remark concerns the statement by the speaker before last, the Swiss Ambassador, and in this regard I would like to express our appreciation for the efforts that Switzerland has made to help the parties involved in the Geneva initiative reach positive results.

During the past year, the Middle East region endured more negative developments and further deterioration. Israeli colonial policies and war crimes in Palestine continued and so did suicide bombings in Israel. Tensions rose and the Arab-Israeli confrontation intensified. Polarization and religious extremism increased. Extremist organizations resumed their work, which included committing terrorist acts in their countries. The region also witnessed a new war and a foreign military presence, which is still present.

The situation in the region was also affected by developments in the international situation and that situation confirms once more that successfully addressing negative international phenomena requires resolving the situation in the region, particularly the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The Middle East conflict, with the question of Palestine at its core, continues to mean that at least part of the region has not yet fulfilled the goals of national liberation in all its complexities and all the consequent impacts on social, economic and political development. The Arabs perceived Israel as a foreign presence, representing foreign interests hostile to Arabs and their countries and aimed at obstructing their advancement. And what they witnessed in the unprecedented injustice committed against the Palestinian people has created a situation of enmity, which became entrenched over the years because of Israeli practices. What is even worse is what the average man on the street saw in Israel's refusal of the Arab leadership's attempts to reach a political settlement based on a two-State solution. Many Arab countries were involved in actual military confrontation with Israel and, as a consequence, some of their territory was occupied. The Arab countries and their peoples endured numerous sacrifices and huge financial losses in this ongoing confrontation.

Indeed, the Arab region is in urgent need of socio-economic development and democratization. But to try to evaluate the situation in the region and influence it while ignoring the above-mentioned facts reflects, at best, a lack of knowledge about the situation. Reaching the necessary goals, including the democratization process, requires, first and foremost, an end to the conflict. The Arabs will not be receptive to foreign efforts in this regard unless they are convinced that those efforts are honest and in the interests of the Arab citizenry. This cannot happen unless we have a balanced policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. In any case, and despite the need for the situation in the region to move in the right direction, this conflict will remain the core issue in this region until it is resolved.

We must keep in mind — as a serious goal — the need to end the foreign military presence in other countries or areas in the region. I refer here, of course, to Iraq. The military presence there should be understood as a strategic position and not as a tactical or immediate one. The transfer of authority and sovereignty to the people and their representatives would be a positive development. But in order to succeed and in order for Iraq to move towards a peaceful and stable situation, more parties from the international community and the region should be involved. What is more important is that the Iraqi people should be convinced that the foreign presence's departure is truly forthcoming. I would also like to emphasize the importance of maintaining the unity and

territorial integrity of Iraq and of rejecting the old colonial ideas on partitioning it, which have again been resurfacing. The Iraqi people are steadfast in their insistence on the unity and sovereignty of their country and should be supported in this regard.

Religious extremism is a phenomenon that is not confined to Arab and Islamic countries alone. In fact, Islam is currently subject to attacks both from within and from without: from within from extremist, insane groups that are foreign to true Islam; from without from those who are pushing for a religious confrontation. Suffice it to mention statements by some in the United States and Europe about Islam and about the Prophet Muhammad. These statements did not even provoke a reaction.

The fact remains that religious extremism is a phenomenon that can be found in all three monotheistic religions and even beyond. It is true that extremism in these three religions has different manifestations at this stage, but they definitely feed off each other. We should recognize this and we should confront it together. Our goal should be to fight religious extremism and nothing else.

The war on terrorism should remain a war on terrorist groups with global scope and a war against religious extremism. We must tackle the breeding grounds for terrorism, but we must also not allow the international agenda to be hijacked or to veer off course in favour of the narrow interests of a party at the centre of the conflict in the Middle East. I refer here to Israel. Israel's attempt to portray its conflict with the Palestinians, or even with Palestinian extremist groups, as part of the war on international terrorism is legally and politically wrong and seriously undermines the war on terrorism. Israel is an occupying Power that is engaged in a colonialist project.

The acts carried out by some Palestinian organizations against civilians in Israel are condemnable, but it should also be clear that such acts are only confined to Israel and have no global scope or connection to the ideological nature of international terrorism. What is more important, those acts are the product of occupation, colonization, oppression and Israeli war crimes, and are not their cause. Ending the causes of these acts will definitely put an end to the phenomenon of terrorism.

Some parties will have to choose: either a war on terrorism and Islamic extremism, which is a war we will not win unless the Arabs and Muslims wage it, or a war on the Arabs and Muslims, as Israel and some of its friends would like. Some parties must choose and we must clearly decide this question.

In summary, Israel's policies are the main reason for the problems of the Middle East. There should be different policies implemented either by Israel, which is something we hope for, or by the international community. Otherwise, the stakes will become too high.

Mr. Kronfol (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): Conflicts and wars have been succeeding each other in the Middle East for more than half a century, since the defeat of the Nazi armies in the Battle of El Alamein, until today. The region witnessed the end of the British and French mandate and the end of colonialism, but Palestine has remained the sole exception to the situation. We have seen the arrival of tens of thousands of Jews from Europe, scarred by war, to create a Jewish State on Arab territory. Those invaders terrorized and deported hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their homes to neighbouring Arab countries and thus we saw the creation, in the heart of the Middle East, of a foreign entity working to expand its territory, to the detriment of the countries of the region, and laying claim to their wealth.

In answer to the remarks we have heard from the representative of the State that is the reason for the tragedy in the Middle East and for the oppression of the Palestinians, remarks about the oppression of Jews by Arabs after 1948, I think it is my duty to recall that the Arabs throughout history have given refuge to oppressed Jews since the fall of Andalusia. That has been the case with various forms of oppression over many centuries, above all, in Europe. No one attacked those Jews who had decided to live in the Arab world, until the creation of the State of Israel through a policy of blood and fire, a policy that made use of terrorism against Jews in other Arab States to prompt them to move to Israel to help establish a national, Jewish, racist homeland on Arab land.

When the Jews arrived in Palestine at the turn of the last century, Christian and Muslim tolerance in Palestine allowed them to settle there. They then made use of the British mandate for Palestine to arm themselves and to carry out massacres of the Arabs in Arab territory. At that time Jews no longer enjoyed the hospitality of the Arab States, and today we wonder

why Israel is working hard to bring all the Jews of the world to the Jewish State, when in fact those Jews live in safety in other countries. We wonder why Israel asks them to come to Israel when it is creating various kinds of destruction and sabotage in the region. That foreign entity unleashed the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, which concluded with a ceasefire and a truce, which the Arabs hoped would be an opportunity to find an international solution that would allow the Palestinians to return to their homes.

But the truce did not last. In 1956, Israel engaged in the tripartite aggression against Suez in Egypt; in 1967 the second Arab-Israeli war was launched and the Israeli army swept through three Arab countries. In 1973 the third war was waged, followed by the expansion of the battlefield through the invasion by Israel of my country, Lebanon, in 1978 without any valid reason, except for the pursuit of Palestinian refugees. In 1982, Israel again invaded Lebanon and reached its capital, Beirut, and it did not withdraw until it was forced out by the Lebanese resistance that lasted more than 22 years. The Arab-Israeli conflict has not yet ended and we have not yet found a solution to the question of Palestine.

The Middle East has seen other wars, including the War of Yemen, the first Gulf War, the second Gulf War, the Ogaden War, the campaign against Somalia, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the conflicts in southern Sudan, the war of liberation of Kuwait up through the Coalition campaign against Iraq. The cold war played an insidious role in fomenting these wars and conflicts. All of that has transformed the Middle East into an issue of daily concern for the entire world. That is due to a precious strategic material, namely, oil, which controls the economy and the future of the world.

After the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the world began to seek a new order for the region that would allow for a political solution to replace the ongoing wars. Experts have tried to resolve the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict through what has been called a solution to the Middle East conflict. That requires the participation of a number of countries and the finalizing of a plan that would allow for peace by consensus between the Arabs, including the Palestinians, and the Israelis.

After tireless efforts, the international community was able to convene the Madrid Peace Conference, during which the parties reached agreement on the principles and basis of a lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. All the parties accepted those principles and those foundations, including the principle of land for peace, but Israel accepted that grudgingly. Peace for Israel meant, and continues to mean, the end of the Zionist dream of expansion, and the submission by Israel, like other countries, to international law. It therefore hastened to sidestep the Madrid agreement by imposing additional conditions on the Palestinians to deprive them of their most fundamental rights. This was done within the framework of the Oslo Agreement, which plunged the peace process for ten years into the swamp of negotiations, while Israel refused to give the Palestinians any rights that would allow them to create their own State on their national soil. Israel insisted on keeping the occupied lands under its control, as well as all components of Palestinian sovereignty. The situation continued to deteriorate up to the present Government in Israel, which has even rejected implementation of the Oslo Agreement, and has turned negotiations with the Palestinians upside down. It went further by blaming the Palestinian Authority and its legitimate leadership for terrorism, sabotage and corruption and destroying its strong holds and institutions.

Once again, Israel totally ignored the Madrid decisions and the Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian tracks. And yet once again, the peace process has stumbled because of Israel intransigence. However, the international community has not given up and it has tried once again through the Quartet to establish a mechanism known as the road map, aimed at bringing the parties back to the negotiating table. Israel rejected the road map the day it was adopted in the Security Council a few weeks ago. Israel set various reservations on it, 14 in all. Israel has continued to demand more time to put an end to the resistance of the Palestinian people to Israeli occupation. More than two years later, the Palestinian people continue to resist that occupation.

The intransigence of Israeli Governments has aborted all international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict and is still continuing. We have heard today that the entire region needs to be changed if we are to have peace.

The whole world knows today that Israel is the obstacle to a comprehensive and just peace because of

its continued refusal to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to create their own State on their national soil within the border as of 4 June 1967 and because of its refusal to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan and other occupied sites in southern Lebanon, such as the Sheb'a farms.

My country and the other Arab countries have opted for peace as a strategic choice. The Arab leaders at the Summit Conference convened in 2002 in Beirut unanimously adopted an Arab peace initiative aimed at the implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as General Assembly resolution 194 (III), and the Madrid decisions and the principle of land for peace. Israel, however, has ignored this initiative and has continued to perpetuate atrocities against the Palestinian people.

My country and the other Arab countries cannot accept Israel's continued refusal to implement United Nations resolutions and its continued description of Palestinian and Lebanese resistance as terroristic. The liberation of land from the Israeli occupying army is a national duty. If the policy of the Israeli Government continues to be one of rejecting peace efforts, there is no doubt that resistance will continue, as well as martyrdom and the shedding of innocent blood on both sides.

The Middle East region has been battered and bloodied for more than 50 years now. The battlefield has expanded to include Iraq, and the nationalities of the widows and orphans has become more numerous. Now these include widows and orphans from peoples all over the world. No people has the right to seek its own security and safety by violating the security and safety of other peoples. The Israeli aggressor, the occupier of the territory of others, has no right to claim to be in danger. All it has to do is withdraw from the territories it is occupying and, like others, respect international law and United Nations resolutions. It is high time to implement those resolutions.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.